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Space Shuttle Endeavor launches. Finally.

Posted By [joseph.pena](#) On July 29, 2009 @ 3:46 pm In [Columns](#), [Lifestyle](#), [News](#) | [1 Comment](#)

If you think of Mother Earth as humanity's protective womb, then launching into space is as complex as giving birth. An amazing number of complicated events must go just right.

After five scrubbed launch attempts of the space shuttle Endeavour, it finally lifted off on Wednesday, July 15, 2009 at 6:03 p.m., more than a month later than originally planned. The first two launches were scrubbed due to a hydrogen leak during fueling. The third launch attempt was delayed 24 hours due to a lightning strike near the space shuttle. Weather scrubbed the next two launch attempts and it wasn't looking good early on Wednesday afternoon. But, the storms moved through making way for an amazing launch.



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I made two trips from San Diego to Florida just to watch my college classmate, Chris Cassidy, launch on this space shuttle mission. This will probably be the only space shuttle launch I'll see since there are only seven left before the shuttle is retired. Also, four changes to my flight itinerary, due to the scrubbed launches, ended up costing a small fortune.

After five scrubbed launch attempts the Space Shuttle Endeavour finally launches. (Photo by Joe Moreno.)

I was fortunate to watch this launch from NASA's VIP section at the Kennedy Space Center's Saturn V viewing site. At about T-3 minutes, the National Anthem was sung through the P.A. system with the spectators joining in.

At T-0 (liftoff) nothing happened! At least I couldn't see anything happening at just over three miles away – which is about as close as anyone gets to the launch pad. The shuttle seemed to be motionless. I glanced at the mission clock and, sure enough, it was counting up. After a couple very long seconds, I could then see smoke emerging from the bottom of the launch pad. A couple seconds after that, I could see the flame from the solid rocket boosters and the shuttle began lifting off. It was at least another ten seconds until I could hear the roar of its engines.

On the second day of the 16-day mission, the Endeavour docked with the International Space Station (ISS). A record was set for most people aboard the ISS at one time when the shuttle's crew of seven joined the six members of the space station. The next day began with two Endeavour crewmembers attaching the Japanese Experiment Module, or JEM, called Kibo – which means, "hope" in Japanese. The JEM will allow science experiments to be performed while exposed to vacuum of space which is why its affectionally known as the space station's "front porch".

At this point, the shuttle mission is pressing forward on schedule. The biggest problem, so far, was a broken toilet aboard the ISS, which was repaired the next day. But, this was not a big issue since the ISS has another toilet and there's also one aboard the Endeavour.

I highly recommend attending a manned space launch if you have the opportunity. The amount of energy released during a space shuttle launch is truly humbling. It literally felt as if the entire planet was sending this vehicle into space.

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